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State picks bridge alternative

By KDN Staff

The State of Alaska has selected a \$244 million two-high bridge option as its preferred alternative for the Gravina Access Project. That's a change from the state's previous preference. Department of Transportation Southeast Region Director Gary Paxton confirmed Monday that the state's preferred alternative is to construct two high bridges, one from Revillagigedo to Pennock Island and a second from Pennock to Gravina Island.

The first bridge, between Revilla and Pennock, would be 3,715 feet long, 250 feet high and have a minimum clearance of 200 feet, said Project Manager Jim Evensen. The second, linking Pennock and Gravina, would be 2,750 long, 160 feet high and have a minimum clearance of 120 feet.

The preferred alternative is included in the state's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which is set to be released to the public Wednesday, said Pat Kemp, DOT pre-construction engineer for the Southeast Region.

The preferred alternative differs from the state's recommended alternative, announced by Gov. Tony Knowles in January 2002. The recommended alternative was also a two-bridge option linking Revilla, Pennock and Gravina, but the bridge from Revilla to Pennock over the east channel of the Tongass Narrows would have had only a 120-foot clearance.

Marine pilots were highly critical of the state's recommended alternative, contending it would cause cruise ships to bypass their normal route and navigate the narrower west channel. The Ketchikan City Council and Ketchikan Gateway Borough Assembly both passed resolutions supporting the construction of two high bridges. The concerns caused the state to change course and select a different preferred alternative, said Paxton. "It was input from the community at large, but it was also specific input from the Coast Guard and the pilots," Paxton said, that changed the state's mind.

For more detail on this story, see Deanna Garrison's article in the Aug. 5, 2003, edition of the Ketchikan Daily News.